

# EATING MEAT AND FISH TOGETHER

*by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt*

The Sages of the Talmud,(1) in their infinite wisdom, determined that eating meat and fish together(2) is a *sakanah*, injurious to one's health. Although medical science admits of no evidence that eating meat and fish together causes illness, we accept the Rabbis' decree unequivocally, for we know that their pronouncement are sacrosanct, their knowledge being as close to Divine wisdom as is humanly attainable. Indeed there have been *poskim*, most notably the Magen Avraham,(3) who have ruled that environmental conditions have changed so, that what once posed a danger no longer does and this prohibition no longer applies.(4) But the vast majority of *poskim* disagree(5) and the basic halachah forbids eating meat (including poultry(6)) and fish together.(7) This is surely the universal custom and should be strictly adhered to.(8)

Since it is prohibited to mix meat and fish in any way, one should also not bake a pot of fish and a pot of meat together in the same oven, unless at least one of the pots is tightly covered. If both pots were left uncovered, then even b'dieved it is questionable if the foods may be eaten. (9) A *rav* should be consulted.

Bread that was baked in an oven together with an uncovered pot of fish may be eaten together with meat, and vice versa. But bread or any other food that was baked, cooked or roasted in a pot together with fish may not be eaten with meat, and vice versa.(10)

## POTS AND DISHES

The prohibition against eating fish and meat applies only when the two foods themselves are actually mixed together. But the *ta'am* (meat or fish taste) exuding from inside the pots or dishes used in their preparation or consumption is of no consequence. There is no requirement to set aside separate dishes and pots for the use of fish and meat. It is, therefore, permitted:

- \* to cook meat in a pot, remove the meat, scrub the pot thoroughly and then cook fish in that pot even on the same day.(11)
- \* to bake an uncovered pot of fish in an oven and then bake an uncovered pot of meat in the same oven, as long as the oven walls are wiped clean of any spills.(12)
- \* to use the same grinder to grind both meat and then fish, even if onions or other sharp foods were added, provided that the blade and receptacle are wiped clean.(13)
- \* to use a clean meaty knife to slice onions that will be cooked with fish. (14)

Similarly, if some chicken soup, for example, inadvertently splashed against the outside of a pot containing fish while it was cooking on the stove, the fish may be eaten. This is because only the ta'am of the chicken will affect the fish in this manner, and that, as stated earlier, is of no consequence.(15)

Even if, inadvertently, fish and meat were actually cooked together in the same pot [and thus may not be eaten], the pot that was used does not need to undergo a koshering process in order to be used in the future. It is sufficient to merely scrub it clean and wait twenty-four hours before using it again.(16)

#### WHEN FISH AND MEAT ARE EATEN CONSECUTIVELY:

The Rishonim debate the degree of severity to which the prohibition against eating fish and meat together extends. Some maintain that we must avoid the mixture to such a degree that even a greasy film which lingers in the mouth or on the hands must be carefully washed off before eating meat after fish, or vice versa. Others, however, hold that we need not be concerned with fatty residue and there is no need to wash one's mouth and hands between eating fish and meat. The final halachah, basically, follows the second opinion.(17)

The following rules apply when both fish and meat will be served at the same meal:

Care must be taken that the foods do not mix. Silverware that was used for fish should not be used for meat unless they are rinsed in between. But it is permitted to place both of the foods on the table at the same time.(18) While it is customary in many places to eat fish before meat, this is not a requirement and it is permitted l'chatchilah to eat meat before fish.(19)

Although, as stated earlier, we are generally not concerned with fatty residue and one is not required to wash his hands(20) and mouth between fish and meat, the poskim do require some type of break between eating fish and meat. Some(21) require that a drink(22) be taken between them, while others(23) stipulate that a food item be eaten in addition to the drink.(24)

**QUESTION:** What could be done if, inadvertently, a piece of fish fell into a pot of chicken soup?

**DISCUSSION:** After removing the piece of fish from the soup [if it can be found] one must estimate whether or not there is sixty times more soup [including vegetables, etc.] than the piece of fish that fell into it. If there is 60 times more soup, then the soup is permitted to be eaten.(25) If not, then the soup should not be eaten.(26) Under extenuating circumstances [e.g., discarding the soup would entail a serious monetary loss; the soup is needed for Shabbos or for important guests; shalom bayis, etc.] it is permitted to add more water or other ingredients to the soup so that there will be sixty times more soup than the piece of fish. (27)

**QUESTION:** Kosher Worcestershire sauce lists anchovies among its ingredients, yet many people use it in preparing steak and other meats. Is that permitted?

**DISCUSSION:** It depends which brand of Worcestershire sauce is being used. In most brands, the anchovy content is so small that the other ingredients easily exceed it by sixty times. It is therefore permitted to use those brands with meat. But some brands of Worcestershire sauce, notably Lea and Perrins, Shoprite and Great Value, contain a greater percentage of fish, and those may not be used with meat.<sup>(28)</sup> When in doubt, the kashruth agency supervising the product should be consulted.

**QUESTION:** In some communities the custom is not to eat fish together with milk [and milk products] as well. Is there any source for this? Should this custom be adopted?

**DISCUSSION:** There are several early sources who warn against mixing fish with milk or milk products. Rabbeinu Bachaye<sup>(29)</sup> writes that doctors believe that eating cheese with fish can lead to all kinds of diseases, and the Beis Yosef<sup>(30)</sup> warns against drinking milk together with fish. But almost all of the latter poskim discount this danger and some go so far as to say that the entire issue is based on a copyist's error!<sup>(31)</sup> Others suggest that we follow current medical opinion concerning this question, since it is a medical - not a halachic - issue.<sup>32</sup> Consequently, only those communities who have traditionally banned the eating of fish and milk together should follow their tradition,<sup>(33)</sup> but it is not a custom that others should adopt.<sup>(34)</sup>

*FOOTNOTES:*

1 Pesachim 76b.

2 The Talmudic advisory warns only against eating fish and meat that were roasted together. The Rishonim deduced that eating them together even if they were prepared separately is also prohibited; see Tur Y.D. 116:2 and Derishah 5.

3 Quoted without comment by the Mishnah Berurah 173:3 and Aruch ha- Shulchan Y.D. 116:10. This is also the view of Teshuvos Maharshdam 4:124, quoting Sefer ha-Kaneh.

4 Note that the Rambam does not mention this prohibition at all, probably for the reasons mentioned by the Magen Avraham; see Chasam Sofer Y.D. 101 and Tiferes Tzvi 91.

5 See Chachmas Adam 68:1, Shulchan Aruch ha-Rav (Shemiras Guf v'Nefesh 9), Maharam Shick Y.D. 244; Yad Efrayim Y.D. 116:3 quoting Shevus Ya'akov 3:70, and Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 33:1 who all either question or ignore the Magen Avraham's opinion.

6 Pischei Teshuvah Y.D. 116:2.

7 The poskim do, however, take the Magen Avraham's view into consideration and allow for some leniency in certain questionable situations; see note 11 and 13.

8 Chasam Sofer Y.D. 101; Divrei Malkiel 2:53; Kaf ha-Chayim O.C. 173:9.

9 If the oven was small and tightly closed then we are concerned with reicha - that one food will

absorb the aroma emitted by the other (Chachmas Adam 68:1). In larger ovens, where reicha is less of a problem, ze'ah - steam which carries the taste of one food to the other - is still an issue.

10 Taz Y.D. 116:2. See Chalkas Yaakov 1:109.

11 Taz Y.D. 95:3, quoted by most of the latter poskim. There is a minority view that holds that separate pots should be used for cooking fish and meat (see Tur Y.D. 116:2, quoted by Chachmas Adam 68:1). Although the basic halachah does not require it (see also note 7), it is customary in many homes to have separate pots for fish and meat.

12 See previous note.

13 Darkei Teshuvah 116:23. There is a minority view that recommends not using the same grinder for fish and meat if they are going to be ground with onions or garlic, but the basic halachah permits it; see Shevet ha-Levi 6:111.

14 See previous note.

15 Pri Megadim, quoted by Reb Akiva Eiger Y.D. 116:2.

16 Divrei Malkiel 2:53; Kaf ha-Chayim Y.D. 116:3; Shemiras ha-Guf V'hanefesh 1:26 quoting Harav P. Epstein. A minority opinion holds that when koshering is possible (e.g., a metal pot), it should be done; see Pischei Teshuvah Y.D. 116:3 and Shevet ha-Levi 6:111.

17 Rama Y.D. 116:3; Mishnah Berurah 173:4. Sefaradim, however, rule in accordance with the first opinion and are careful to wash their mouth and hands between eating fish and meat; Kaf ha-Chayim O.C. 173:4; Yalkut Yosef 173:2.

18 Noda b'Yehudah (Kama) E.H. 13; Shevet ha-Levi 6:111; Yabia Omer Y.D. 6:9. It is also permitted for two people to eat fish and meat on the same table at the same time, even while sharing the same tablecloth; Kaf ha-Chayim O.C. 173:6.

19 See Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 33:1 and Ben Ish Chai, Pinchas 8:10. See also Shulchan Aruch O.C. 173:2 and Y.D. 116:2: between meat and fish ...

20 In the atypical case [e.g., silverware is not being used] when the hands are soiled from fish, they should be wiped clean before partaking of meat; see Pri To'ar Y.D. 116:3.

21 Chachmas Adam 68:1, quoted by Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 173:2. There is no need to swish the drink around in the mouth.

22 For unknown reasons, Tosfos, Moed Katan 11a (quoted by Reb Akiva Eiger Y.D. 116 and by Kaf ha-Chayim 170:79), advises against drinking water [or soda] after fish. She'arim Metzuyanin B'halachah 33:2 suggests that for this reason whiskey - and not water - is customarily drunk between fish and meat.

23 Rama Y.D. 116:3, quoted by Mishnah Berurah 173:4.

24 A food item dipped in wine or another beverage covers both requirements; Y.D. 116:3, as explained by Perishah 23.

25 Chachmas Adam 68:1; Pischei Teshuvah 116:3; Aruch ha-Shulchan 116:10. While a minority view maintains that "dangers" such as fish and meat together are not bateil b'shishim (Taz Y.D. 116:2), most poskim do not accept this stringency.

26 If it is questionable whether or not there is sixty times more soup than fish, some poskim are lenient while others are stringent. A rav should be consulted.

27 Although there is a general rule that bitul b'shishim must happen on its own and one cannot cause it to happen intentionally, many poskim permit doing so concerning a fish and meat mixture; see Pischei Teshuvah Y.D. 116:3 and Divrei Malkiel 2:53. Since other poskim disagree (see Darkei Teshuvah 116:20-21), one should rely on this leniency only under extenuating circumstances.

28 The Orthodox Union, for instance, designates an OU Fish symbol for those sauces that should not be used with meat

29 Shemos 23:19, quoted by Pischei Teshuvah Y.D. 87:9.

30 Y.D. 87:3.

31 See Taz Y.D. 87:3 and Shach 5 and Machazik Berachah 4.

32 See Darkei Teshuvah Y.D. 87:43 and Kaf ha-Chayim O.C. 173:3.

33 The Sefaradim, especially, are careful not to mix cheese or milk with fish (Ben Ish Chai, Beha'alos'echa 15) but most are lenient concerning butter with fish; Yechaveh Da'as 6:48.

34 Aruch ha-Shulchan Y.D. 87:15.

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